

Representative Jeff Morris Reports to the 40th District



Rep. Jeff Morris

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Dear Citizen,

By the time you read this, the 2002 session of the Washington State Legislature will be well under way. Since the election last fall gave the Democrats a one-vote majority in the House, ending three years of a 49-49 tie, hopefully you will have seen some improvements. The fact is our two-party system of government was designed to work best when one party has a majority. Otherwise, the result is too often gridlock.

Our state is facing a profound crisis, both with the general budget and with the transportation budget. The terrorist assaults against our country — and other factors including last year's energy crisis, drought, and Nisqually earthquake — have helped spawn economic recession. A consequence of the recession is that we have a \$1.2 billion deficit. I'm committed to balancing the budget without increasing general taxes.

While we work to balance the state's budget, I realize that many families are struggling to do the same. Layoffs have hit families hard. The Pacific Northwest now leads the nation in unemployment. I will work to fund worker-retraining programs and unemployment resources that help sustain families until laid off employees can find new jobs.

The Legislature will also be taking a scrutinizing look at safety and emergency response measures throughout the state. The House Democratic Caucus has formed the Select Committee on Community Security in response to the September 11th attacks on our country. I was appointed to that committee and will work to proactively protect our communities and to support our state's citizens who are called to active duty.

As your representative, I hope you will share with me any ideas and suggestions you may have on statewide issues, or the issues that directly affect our community. My assistant, Georgia Requa, and I look forward to receiving your letters, email and phone calls. Please let me know how I can better serve you during this legislative session.

Sincerely,

Jeff Morris
State Representative



Representative Jeff Morris

Balancing the budget

We face a daunting budget situation with the \$1.2 billion deficit. It could have been worse — I was proud last session to fend off over \$500 million in extra program additions that were offered to the budget on the floor of the House as amendments. But balancing this budget is going to be heart-wrenching — after several years of tax cuts and budget trimming, there are no easy choices left.



The Legislature is mandated by the State Constitution to fund certain programs like K-12 education. Even though our deficit is about 5% of our overall budget, the fact is that legislators can only make choices on about 40% of the total budget. The rest is untouchable.

That means we must make 15% percent cuts in many agencies to balance the books. I have heard no one in the House speak of any tax increases to fill this gap. There are no more band-aids in the medicine chest to patch over the holes caused by recent initiatives. We will make the cuts.

As we face this crisis, I want to report to you that I have trimmed my office budget 45% this biennium already.

House forms anti-terrorism committee

I'm honored to serve on the newly established House Select Committee on Community Security. The formation of the committee, which is charged with overseeing the state's anti-terrorism efforts, was one of the first actions taken by the new Democratic majority in the House of Representatives.



We may never have to deal with attacks from within our own borders here in Washington. Certainly that's the hope we all share. But the September 11 attacks on America showed us clearly that we had better be ready to prevent or respond to any contingency. That's where this new, bipartisan committee will focus its attention.

The committee will be responsible for performing an inventory of the state's capacity to avert and respond to terrorist attacks, examining the preparedness of state and local law enforcement agencies, emergency response teams, and public health departments. Among its many tasks, the committee will:

- Review the safety of major transportation networks, energy facilities, state buildings and public venues, and water and food production facilities;
- Ensure the state's ability to prevent or handle a possible bioterrorism attack;
- Consider changes to the state's criminal code designed to enhance the state's ability to fight terrorism; and
- Support citizens who are called up to active military duty.

This is a critical time in America, and in Washington, and I'm grateful for the chance to contribute by serving on this committee.

Reports to the 40th District

Orca Whale Research

As you may know, the Orca population is steadily declining. Applications have been made to list the Orca as an endangered species. The plain fact is that we do not currently have the years of research data or dedicated research funds at the state level – that is needed to save one of the icons of Washington State.

I am introducing legislation that will create a voluntary license-tab program to generate monies for whale research on the pods of Orcas who live in the Salish Sea.

I propose having a contest amongst state school children to design a sticker that can be placed on your license plate. Citizens then could make a voluntary \$5 donation to get the sticker. Those funds would go toward a competitive grant fund for Orca research.

Pacific Northwest Economic Region

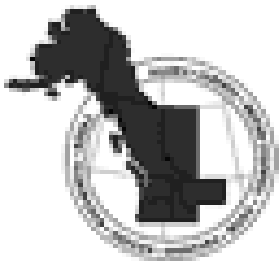
This past July, I was elected president of the Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER). Elected officials from the states of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and the provinces of British Columbia and Alberta and the Yukon Territory serve on PNWER. Together, our region has the 9th largest economy in the world. When you consider that California by itself has the 4th largest economy in the world, you can see what an impact the West Coast of North America has on the global economy.

PNWER's mission is economic development and sustainable jobs. Most recently, we assembled private critical infrastructure owners (critical infrastructure are electrical transmission operators, pipeline operators and telecommunications systems) from across the region to discuss forming a regional security plan in response to the post 9/11/01 threats.

The reality is that our recent electrical crises telegraphed some of largest vulnerabilities our society has, and we must take steps to secure them.

PNWER is also working towards a customs and immigration policy that promotes a zone of confidence in North America. This concept pushes decision-making of foreign nationals wanting to visit North America to their countries of origin. Canada currently does this and in fact turned away 33,000 people from Europe alone last year in Europe alone.

Much more information on PNWER is Available at their web site www.pnwer.org.



Rep. Jeff Morris outside the Capitol with Anacortes resident Brandon Vance. Brandon spent a week serving as a page for the House of Representatives during the 2001 session.



Representative Jeff Morris

Energy Update



As you know, I have been very active in energy issues since you sent me to Olympia. This year, I was elected Chair of the House Technology, Telecommunications and Energy Committee. In that capacity, I hope to build on the successes of last session.

One of the brightest spots of 2001 was the Legislature's response to last year's energy crisis. Caused by what analysts termed our "the perfect storm" — a combination of storm fronts hitting from different directions at the same time — Washington residents began to dread finding their energy bills in the mailbox. Rapidly growing demand caused in large part by the West Coast's soaring population and the high-tech economy, rising natural-gas prices, that record drought, and California's deregulation disaster made it a challenge to increase power supplies while protecting consumers and our environment.

To make Washington more energy independent, the Legislature united behind a strong, bipartisan energy package that includes:

- Mandatory energy audits and energy efficiencies in state-funded facilities that will save an estimated 580 million-tax dollars worth of energy over 20 years.
- A public-private partnership that will help about 11,000 needy families pay power bills without further cutting back on food, medicine and other necessities.
- New pollution-control tax credits allowing some existing power plants to run longer without creating more air pollution.
- New renewable-power initiatives requiring utilities to give consumers the choice of buying blocks of power generated by wind, the sun and other environmentally friendly sources.
- Tax credits to help aluminum companies and other huge energy users build on-site power plants.
- Streamlined rules for siting energy facilities will bring more power on-line faster, without sacrificing our clean air and other environmental commitments.

This energy package, which I co-sponsored, earned near unanimous support and was called a major achievement by the *Seattle P.I.*

This session I hope to continue to move Washington State toward energy-independence by instituting a long-term planning process that will help us anticipate energy shortages and take preventive steps *before* another energy crisis hits.

Introducing my new Legislative Assistant

I am so pleased to announce that Georgia Requa has come to Olympia as my Legislative Assistant. Georgia, a 25-year resident of Mount Vernon, is here to work with you. She knows what is going on in our area, and we look forward to hearing what you have to say about the issues facing our state. We believe our duty is to serve citizens in a swift and professional manner.

Keeping in touch

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President, Pacific Northwest Economic Region

Select Committee on Community Security

Finance